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Ménie Muriel Dowie's A Girl in the Karpathians (1891): Girlhood and the Spirit of Adventure

By Beth Rodgers

Although she did not feature in W.T. Stead's influential 1894 essay "The Novel of the Modern Woman," the publication of Gallia in 1895 firmly established Ménie Muriel Dowie (1867-1945) as one of the pre-eminent New Woman writers. A controversial novel in which "the eugenic project is overt," Gallia has been of some interest to scholars of the New Woman novel (Ledger 70).[1] Despite this, Dowie remains one of the more obscure of the New Woman writers and her work beyond Gallia is seldom discussed. However, one hundred years after its first publication, Gallia was reprinted by Everyman in 1995. Helen Small's introduction to this edition also contains the fullest account of Dowie's life to date, in which the author is shown to be "every bit as defiant of convention as the heroine of her first novel" (Small xxvi).[2] But, as Small points out in this introduction, it was her 1891 book A Girl in Karpathians, a vivacious account of a summer of intrepid independent travel undertaken in 1890 when Dowie was twenty-two years old and unmarried, as opposed to Gallia that first established Dowie's considerable contemporary literary reputation. A Girl in the Karpathians enjoyed enthusiastic reviews and impressive sales. The Review of Reviews deemed it "[t]he most noticed, and in some respects most noticeable, book of the month" ("The New Books of the Month" 627). In the first year alone, the book went through five English, four American, and one German edition, and its author quickly became something of a literary celebrity (Small xxviii). According to John Sutherland, Dowie proudly claimed that the book received four hundred reviews, all unanimous in their praise (195). Both A Girl in Karpathians and its author were a sensation: as Small notes, news of Dowie and her career featured regularly in "the

literary papers and society magazines of the day," followed "with interest" by the 1890s reading public (xxix). Dowie's marriage to journalist Henry Norman in the months following the publication of A Girl in the Karpathians only consolidated her considerable celebrity credentials – as the grand-daughter of the famous Scottish publisher, Robert Chambers, an author herself, and now the wife of a well-known journalist, she became regarded as a literary figure through and through.[3]

Despite its great popularity at the time, A Girl in the Karpathians has received much less critical attention than Gallia in recent discussions of Dowie's work and her place within the history of the New Woman writing.[4] This disparity today mirrors a curious incongruence in the reception of the two books at the time of their publication – only at that time the current imbalance was reversed. A Girl in the Karpathians features and sometimes even pre-empts many of the tropes associated with the New Woman writing and with the contemporary Woman Question more broadly – the intrepid heroine smokes, wears breeches and travels alone without a chaperone. Contemporary reviewers across the press tended to accept and celebrate Dowie's depiction of unconventional femininity in her travel memoir in a way they did not upon the appearance of Gallia four years later. Noting that the feminist press at the period often did not review Gallia at all, Molly Youngkin suggests this was because the novel, with its extreme, eugenicist take on marriage and motherhood, "pushed the limits of what was acceptable to feminists" (129). But rather than think about what made Gallia unacceptable to contemporary readers and reviewers, this essay seeks to explore how and why A Girl in the Karpathians was deemed to be so acceptable despite its depiction of unconventional femininity. Harriet Devine Jump suggests that Dowie "deliberately shocked her readers" (xiv). How did Dowie "get away" with such eccentric behaviour and secure those glowing reviews across the press? Is it

simply that, unlike *Gallia*, the book did not appear amid the full thrust of controversy regarding New Woman writing, or are other factors at play as well?

This essay argues that it is possible to understand both the success of Dowie's bestselling book and its relationship to the New Woman writing differently by examining it within the context of late-nineteenth-century debates about girlhood and the burgeoning girls' print culture of the time. As I will demonstrate, contemporary girls' magazines such as the Girl's Realm and the Young Woman endorsed both the book and its author. By considering how Dowie negotiated her popularity with this audience it is possible to perceive how she "got away" with her lack of convention and also how she actively participated in contemporary debates about the Woman Question by engaging with debates about girlhood. It is perhaps the case that writing that gained much of its success among girl readers has been rather side-lined in literary history, but, in acknowledging the discussion of A Girl in the Karpathians in popular girls' magazines, this essay argues for the significance of this unusual travel narrative in the history of early New Woman writing. It also makes the case for the role of travel in the articulation of the imaginative lives of girls and young women at this period. In doing so, the essay also seeks to challenge some of the ways in which we conceptualise the New Woman writing of the late nineteenth century.

In addition to exploring how Dowie is presented in girls' magazines, the essay also considers the importance of girlhood to the text's success in terms of the relationship between Dowie's cultivation of a vibrant and endearing literary persona (as an adventuring real-life girl heroine) and her political position on the Woman Question. Small reports that Methuen, publishers of Gallia, frequently advertised the novel as "'by the author of A Girl in the Karpathians' or, more commonly, 'by the Girl in the Karpathians,'" in order to "capitalise on the established celebrity of their

new author" (xxx). This advertising strategy reveals a tendency across the press to focus on Dowie's personality, to conflate her with "the Girl" of the book, and to emphasise her girlhood (as opposed to womanhood), even after her marriage. I will demonstrate the ways in which Dowie knowingly exploits this focus on her vibrant personality and her own status as a "girl" to her own commercial and political advantage. The final section of the essay extends this discussion by considering to what extent Dowie's interest in clothing within the text and in interviews is politicised. In one respect, Dowie's interest in Rational Dress represents the more radical aspects of her stance on the Woman Question, but on the other hand her description of clothing within A Girl in the Karpathians contributes towards the eccentricity that is seen to be refreshing and charming rather than alarming and threatening in contemporary reviews. Before these elements are discussed in more detail, however, it is important to consider the generic characteristics of A Girl in the Karpathians and its relationship with other texts.

A Girl in the Karpathians and Genre: a New Girl Adventure Story?

One of the most striking features of A Girl in the Karpathians is its unusualness in terms of genre and, as a result, the question of where to place the book generically is much less straightforward than may be expected. The first copy of the text I consulted (a copy of the fourth edition) came from the London Library stamped as "Travel: Austria." Yet, this definitive stamp belies the generic ambiguity of the book and sits in stark contrast to the new preface Dowie included in this edition. As I will discuss later in more detail, the new preface to the fourth edition altered the emphasis of the book's contents, thereby challenging notions of generic stability and complicating its

status as a work of travel writing. Indeed, one of Dowie's key points in this new preface concerns this very question of genre: in reference to confounding her publisher's expectations about the book's contents, she remarks that her book fits into "no distinct literary category" (vi). Nevertheless, a consideration of the ways Dowie's book plays with and ultimately rejects generic classification is useful in determining the reasons for the book's success, and how it may or may not fit in with the history of the New Woman writing, travel writing and the adventure tale.

Genre is of course a clear point of difference between this book and Dowie's New Woman novel, Gallia. The New Woman writing of the 1890s is generally associated with prose fiction, with a special emphasis on the short story, and with a certain set of characteristics. Writing such topics as marriage, motherhood, sexuality and artistic ambition with, in Elaine Showalter's words, "unprecedented candour," the New Woman writers experienced both success and notoriety in their time (viii). To what extent can a text ostensibly considered to be (and initially marketed as) a travel memoir fit into this body of largely fiction-based work produced by the New Woman writers? In addition, published before the New Woman was officially christened by Sarah Grand in 1894, A Girl in the Karpathians is perhaps too early to be counted officially among the New Woman texts. Yet, notions of genre and the generally perceived timeframe of the New Woman writing are perhaps limited. As Michelle Tusan has argued, the term itself may have been in circulation before 1894, and indeed one of the most notorious New Woman novels (Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm) was published in 1883.[5] It is therefore not unreasonable to draw connections between Dowie's 1891 book and the aims and politics of the New Woman writing, irrespective of Dowie's later contribution to that body of work.

For a start, A Girl in the Karpathians certainly sits alongside other examples of

New Woman writing in so far as it shares with them a significant degree of commercial success. George Egerton's Keynotes (1893), for instance, went into its seventh edition within three years (Pykett 7), a statistic challenged by Dowie's five editions in one year. The fourth edition was produced as an official "cheap edition" making it all the more accessible to the reading public. Perhaps more importantly, Dowie's book arguably shares a degree of formal inventiveness with other examples of the New Woman writing. Pykett suggests that New Woman writing, like women's sensation fiction of the 1860s, is "grounded in women writers' attempts to find a form, or forms, in which to represent and articulate women's experience, and women's aspirations and anxieties, as well as anxieties about women" (6). Egerton's proto-modernist short stories, Olive Schreiner's unusual allegories, and even the more lyrical passages of Sarah Grand's The Beth Book (1897) all spring to mind when considering this propensity for formal innovation on the part of the New Woman writers in pursuit of ways to express women's desires and frustrations. With its self-conscious generic inventiveness, A Girl in the Karpathians functions in a similar way. Dowie's experiments with form and genre offer new modes of expressing girlhood and articulate her own particular engagement with the Woman Question.

At times, Dowie's derring-do makes her book read like an adventure story. In New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction: Gender, Genre, Empire (2006), LeeAnne Richardson suggests that there is a much greater relationship between the New Woman writing and colonial adventure fiction than has previously been understood. As opposed to being "two distinct and separate subgenres," Richardson argues for their "convergence around key discursive sites, tropes, and themes" and cites Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm as an important example (2-3). Richardson's argument is persuasive: "As in most colonial romances, Schreiner

literalizes a topology of adventure: the majesty of the South African karoo reflects Lyndall's striving spirit; its isolation reflects her singularity; its desolation reflects the hardships she undergoes" (79). In a similar way, Dowie maps both her personality and her personal quest onto the landscape of the Karpathian mountains, successfully harnessing the narrative potential of adventurous, searching, modern girlhood. Though not a novel and not set in the colonial worlds explored by Richardson's study, Dowie's book nevertheless also gestures towards the "convergences" that are possible between New Woman writing and adventure fiction. Given the book's emphasis on girlhood, A Girl in the Karpathians might arguably be seen as an adventure story for the New Girl, a possible precursor to the work of girls' writers such as Bessie Marchant. Notably, this aspect of the book is consolidated retrospectively upon the publication in 1893 of Women Adventurers, Dowie's book of profiles of particularly bold and adventurous women travellers.

Indeed, A Girl in the Karpathians marks a crossover point between New Woman writing and a longer history of women's travel writing more broadly. Devine Jump suggests that some Victorian women travel writers "would most certainly have been surprised … by the suggestion that their activities and texts could be read as powerful arguments for the feminist cause simply by virtue of their demonstration of women's strength and capabilities." In contrast, however, she suggests that "this fact is clearly acknowledged" by Dowie (Devine Jump xiv). This identification of Dowie's book as part of the history of women's travel writing is interesting: it suggests that Dowie knowingly exploits what she considered to be the latent feminist potential of this genre. By initially promoting her book as a work of travel writing, of which there was already a history of women writers, she is able to engage legitimately in the intrepid nature of her travels and to distract from the more controversial aspects

of her book which subsequently become more emphasised in future editions and interviews in the periodical press. Like other New Woman writers, she experiments with genre in order to find new modes of expression and to articulate her own particular engagement with the Woman Question. The novelty of this generic inventiveness is arguably responsible for much of the book's commercial success. For, as I will now demonstrate, this generic ambiguity also opens up the possibility for the book's important emphasis on girlhood and for Dowie's formidable literary persona as adventurous New Girl to be constructed with aplomb.

Dowie, Modern Girlhood and Late-Victorian Girls' Culture

Published in 1891, A Girl in the Karpathians coincided with and contributed to a burgeoning period in the history of girls' culture and girlhood. Sally Mitchell and Carol Dyhouse among others have demonstrated that the late nineteenth century saw a great many changes in the lives of girls and young women, in both material and imaginative terms.[6] Mitchell makes particular reference to the period 1880-1915 as a time in which "both working-class and middle-class girls increasingly occupied a separate culture" (3). The 1880s thus also saw a remarkable growth in the number of books and magazines published for girls as a specific readership.[7] The Girl's Own Paper launched in 1880, followed by magazines such as Atalanta (launched in 1887), Young Woman (in 1892) and Girl's Realm (in 1898), and the great success of prolific authors such as L.T. Meade and Evelyn Everett-Green, who specialised in girls' books, attests to the commercial potential of this burgeoning readership.[8]

As Elizabeth Segel and others have pointed out, this separation of the juvenile

market into books for boys and books for girls occurred for highly practical reasons, including cheaper print costs and the higher levels of literacy that were a result of Education Acts in 1870 and 1880.[9] But this notion of girls as a "separate category" had effects beyond the reading material that specifically targeted them. Across the periodical press and across both popular and literary fiction of the 1880s and 1890s it is possible to discern a growing fascination with girlhood and with the perceived relationship between girlhood and modernity. Part of this is, of course, down to the New Woman writing itself, which frequently featured girl protagonists or paid particular heed to the girlhood of the protagonist in the early stages of the text. Schreiner's Lyndall in The Story of an African Farm, Grand's Beth Caldwell in The Beth Book (1897), and Ella Hepworth Dixon's Mary Erle in The Story of a Modern Woman (1899) are all significant examples. In The Awkward Age in Women's Popular Fiction, 1850-1900 (2004), Sarah Bilston draws attention to "the place of fantasies and dreams of girlhood in books written by and aimed primarily at adult women readers" (8). Yet, the fascination with Dowie in magazines that targeted adolescent girls themselves suggest that Dowie's "dreams of girlhood" as enacted atop the Karpathian mountains spoke extremely powerfully to girl readers themselves, as opposed to (but no doubt including) nostalgic women readers. I would argue that much of Dowie's success lies in her ability to tap into the versions of modern girlhood that held particular appeal to contemporary girl readers, who so voraciously consumed periodicals, school stories, and adventure tales. By depicting girlhood as a time of agency and self-confidence, Dowie's travel memoir/adventure tale successfully appeals to girl readers and also cleverly alludes to wider discussions about the nature of girlhood and its relationship to modernity.

The girls' magazines mentioned above no doubt contributed to Dowie's

success and moreover to her status as a literary celebrity. In accordance with Youngkin's analysis of the women's press, girls' magazines also rarely make reference to Gallia, although the Young Woman does briefly call is a "vivacious" novel (P.L.P. 208). The story is very different, however, when it comes to A Girl in the Karpathians: references to both Dowie and the book in a number of girls' magazines suggest that girls may have formed a significant part of the large readership that drove the book to so many editions in its first year. It is owing to this book specifically, for example, that Dowie is included in Alice Jones's "Notable Girls of the Nineteenth Century," an article published in the second volume of the Girl's Realm. The article focuses on "notable girls" from a range of spheres, with a particular interest in women writers, such as Charlotte Bronte and Christina Rossetti. Other kinds of heroines are praised too, including the life-saving Grace Darling and the woman explorer Mary Kingsley. Dowie is singled out for what Jones describes as her "gallant spirit and high courage" (279). Like Darling and Kingsley, Dowie is celebrated for her physical feats of strength and bravery, but, for Jones, she boasts an additional impressive achievement of interest to girl readers in having translated this "gallant spirit" so effectively into book form. In an article so interested in female authors and female adventurers, Dowie stands out for combining both aspects of heroism in one "notable girl."

Despite this clear endorsement of Dowie in a girls' magazine, there is a degree of suggestion elsewhere that some observers were concerned about the book's popularity among girls. In an 1891 All the Year Round article, in which the author attempts to deflate anxieties about the effects of reading on the morality of women and children, the book is listed among what can best be described as the reading crazes of a "young lady … of the discreet age of twelve" ("Writers – and Readers"

343). The article's language makes it clear that the girl's reading habits involve indiscretion, excess and subterfuge – she has been "caught" reading "The Murder in the Hansom Cab," for example; the next day she is found "absorbed in one of Mr. Henty's books for boys"; finally, "after a dozen other authors have intervened, it is 'A Girl in the Karpathians'" (343). The author's insistence that "this young lady is as pleasant, and sweet, and wholesome a specimen of English girlhood as you would care to meet" despite such reading practices and choices suggests that not everyone might expect this to be the case.

Yet, this note of consternation seems not to have been the norm. The book is recommended to Ruby Morris, a young subscriber to Hearth and Home's "Lassies and Laddies" column (her exact age is unclear, but it can be determined that she is under eighteen from the editor's explanation that she is too young to join a particular guild due to this age restriction) in response to her request for recommendations of "books of adventure" (401). The editor's response suggests that Ruby is also a writer herself, and it is notable that the editor deems Dowie's work to be of particular value to a young reader interested in both adventure and authorship. Furthermore, Dowie's popularity with girls like Ruby is confirmed by a comment in a lengthy interview published in the Young Woman in 1896. Referring to a tendency among some journalists to "misunderstand" Dowie, the interviewer tellingly notes that: "The girls of England do not misunderstand her, for they write long letters delighting in her travels, and claiming kinship with her – a welcome company of critics" (P.L.P. 208).

It is intriguing to consider that Dowie is presented in these articles and profiles as an acceptable role model figure, despite the fact that the book arguably preempts the more overt feminist content of Gallia, with which girls' magazines often had an ambiguous relationship. L.T. Meade, however, editor of Atalanta and an author whose

immensely prolific output of girls' books helped to inaugurate girls as a distinct readership in the first place, seems in no doubt as to the reasons for the popularity of Dowie's first book among girl readers. Despite her sense that some of Dowie's words go "beyond the verge of good taste [for] there is a touch of more than flippancy in some of her smart sayings," Meade is generally rather impressed by Dowie's "frankness and unconventionality" in her review of the book for Atalanta's regular "Brown Owl" column (667).[10] She points out that "the average reader wishes to be amused, not instructed" by travel books, and declares, therefore, that:

> … readers will find much to enjoy in A Girl in the Karpathians, by M.M. Dowie (George Philip). The title of the volume admirably indicates its contents. From the first to the last the chief interest of the book is the "Girl," not the "Karpathians." (667)

Meade's comment succinctly captures what makes Dowie's book so interesting for girl readers. By depicting girlhood as a time of adventure, independence and self-confidence, Dowie's representation of girlhood looms larger than any mountain range in the imagination of her girl readers. For such readers, it is a book about girlhood, not topography.

But this was not how the book was initially introduced to the public, which once again raises the question of genre. In an article published in the Fortnightly Review prior to the book's publication entitled "In Ruthenia," Dowie reports that she engaged in a dedicated period of study in the British Museum when writing the book in order to supplement it with facts about the history of Ruthenia, "a country that has never belonged to itself" (520). In contrast to Meade's reading of the book, Dowie's article attests to the book's emphasis on the people and geography of Ruthenia, as

opposed to "the Girl." This emphasis is borne out by the paratextual features of the first edition, which included a fold-out map. In her preface to this first edition, Dowie stresses that the map "is not primarily intended to show the scene of the Author's wanderings, but, - what is perhaps more important, - the whereabouts of the Karpathian Mountains and the extent of Poland prior to her dismemberment: two points somewhat imperfectly remembered by the public" (vi). One reviewer praises the inclusion of such a map as "in itself a valuable lesson in history" (Minchin 533). For The Review of the Reviews, the map is representative of the book's "solid value," despite its tone of "airy, laughing cheekiness": "the map which she gives of the territorial dismemberment of Poland," it is suggested, "is as serious a contribution to the understanding of the tragedy of history as has been published this year" (627). Not all agreed, however: the reviewer for The New Review declared the coloured map to be "a kind of joke in geography, for it is delightfully useless" (Austin 567).

This reviewer's glib response was, it seems, rather prescient. By the fourth edition of the book later that year, something has changed. The map has disappeared, and in its place we find a new preface that shifts the focus of Dowie's book from strict travel memoir to something else. Originally marketed as a travel book, it seems that the book's success has emphasised its generic inconsistencies, and this new preface is clearly written from the standpoint of Dowie's recent experience of media scrutiny and literary celebrity. She explains that she has removed the map because she is in no position to instruct, somewhat contradicting her Fortnightly Review article (Preface vi). She also seems to resist some of the enthusiasm with which both she and her book have been greeted by the press. Stating that it is certainly "not a 'Tale of Adventure,'" Dowie appears to be rather dismissive and weary of the excitement swirling around what she had referred to in the Fortnightly as her "little book" (520). She writes:

> I recall repeated simperings of regret as I explained to my publisher that I had never been within paw's length of a bear; that there were no hairbreadth's escapes – in fact, no genuine bookstall sensations to win the suffrages of the public. It was merely the record of a girl's summer roaming and a girl's summer thoughts, told in her own way, and with a disregard of conventions she saw no reason to respect. (Preface v)

Dowie is perhaps being somewhat disingenuous in this last statement. The removal of the map was arguably a prudent move on the part of Dowie and her publishers, one that recognises how compelling and powerful this narrative of "a girl's mere summer thoughts" has been for its readers. By blurring the edges of the factual location of her travels, thereby removing the geographical specificity of the adventure, Dowie emphasises those aspects of the book that are more concerned with the exploration of an adventurous girl's interior world, rendering that world much more universal and accessible. The move seems to say that her adventures and her passionate nature, that wilful "disregard of convention," can in fact belong to any aspirational girl reader. As Dowie states in the early stages of the book, "adventure is not everything; there is incident, and the next half-hour must always bring that with it" (10). Without the map, the book becomes much more about the "Girl" than the "Karparthians," as Meade asserted, and therefore more about the possible adventurous "incidents" accessible to every modern girl reading it. As noted above, this fourth edition was marketed as a "cheap edition," no doubt in part made possible by the excision of the map (though the illustrations remained). Yet, the fact that Dowie gives an explanation for the map's removal that completely ignores any question of cost reveals a great deal about what she deems to be important in her communication with

readers. It is tempting to speculate that the combination of the altered price and the altered prefatory material are designed with girl readers specifically in mind, for whom the book is now more accessible than ever, in both financial and imaginative terms.

"Sparkling and bright": Fashioning the Girl in the Karpathians

Contemporary reviewers did more than simply recognise the general focus on girlhood in Dowie's text: in addition, they also referred again and again to the unusually enthralling and charming nature of this particular "Girl." This section of the essay explores how Dowie's construction of a forthright, endearing and charismatic literary persona in both the book itself and in interviews enabled her not only to acquire a "company of [girl] critics" but also to deflate the potential controversy associated with her book and encourage its success.

Dowie was clearly aware of the unconventional nature of her independent expedition. In her Fortnightly article, she alludes to some trepidation over the public response to her forthcoming book: "There are lux-cats, bears, and wolves in the Carpathians, and I know that everybody will think there are other obstacles for a girl travelling alone; but that isn't the case" (520-1).[11] But it seems she succeeded in charming reviewers, readers, and editors into accepting the potentially scandalous aspects of her independent travel through sheer dint of personality. For The Academy's reviewer, J.G. Cotton Minchin, "The charm of the book is undeniable. The style and matter are alike sparkling and bright" (533). Another reviewer congratulates this "lively author" on the rapid publication of a fourth edition of her

"altogether charming book" (Country Gentleman 4). For yet another, Dowie is an "extremely vivacious entity" ("A Fair Individualist" 607). This great charm is not forgotten by the press. In their (not entirely favourable) review of Gallia in 1895, dubbed "rather a book for the study than for the drawing-room," the Saturday Review reminds readers of "the fascinating and adventurous 'Girl in the Karpathians'" (384, 383).

Certainly, the book is full of flashes of personality. Dowie delights in describing her unconventional attire of knickerbockers – "an adieu to the trappings of an average woman" – and her revolver loaded and ready for an imminent bear attack, despite her blasé attitude to such things in her later preface (17). The narrative revels in the mystified responses of local peasants to Dowie's solitary, commanding presence in the mountains:

> "The young lady belongs, no doubt, to the German company?" he said, of course in German. Giving him to understand that I belonged exclusively to myself, I assumed the hauteur which used to be the property of people in novels, and which is, I hope, very foreign to my real nature, and ordered tea. (8-9)

Dowie's quick-witted reply is typical of the tone throughout the book, as is her somewhat superior self-regard in relation to the native population. In response to one person's enquiry as to which country she belongs, for example, Dowie replies: "To one where no one felt bound to answer the impertinent questions of strangers" (27).

It is this "sparkling and bright" style that arguably enables Dowie to push certain boundaries in her portrayal of independent girlhood. Descriptions of her physical travel and activities are mapped onto discussion of adventure across the

borders of female respectability, in the text itself and articles about it. No longer "afflicted by the hesitations of Hyde Park," Dowie is able to ride cross-saddle or bareback on her horses ("In Ruthenia" 521). She sleeps out in the open – "it does not require colossal fortitude" – with only a male peasant guide for company (Girl 253). Living conditions in one village force her to "leave Western indecency behind [and pursue her] toilet with an unconcerned directness which education and popular influences have tried in vain to spoil" (41). Instead, she learns to swim and bathe in wild rivers, no doubt the impetus for the reviewer in The Queen to dub her "the nymph of the waters and the flower of the morn" (qtd. in Small xxviii). These passages, interwoven with descriptions of the fecundity of the mountain landscapes, are evocative of both a physical and imaginative freedom available to girls beyond the rigidity of Western social structures – the social world to which the middle-class readers of Girl's Realm and Young Woman may indeed have felt bound.

Dowie takes great pleasure in narrating the excitement of this personal freedom and in contrasting her inner sense of adventure with the social expectations she is knowingly subverting. Her description of river rafting, for example, builds to a passionate narrative crescendo:

> The rush, the bang, the excitement, the shouting, the yellow foam – churned, curdled, lashing and bubbling, snatching at obstacles, and bearing them away impotent, resistless, the continuous rumble of displaced rocks, the rattle of chased gravel, pebbles and sand! (259)

Following this heady experience, the reader is tellingly informed that "The sun dried me to an appearance of external respectability before I faced the village" (260, my emphasis). Furthermore, Dowie is audacious in her advocacy of solitary travel for

girls. It seems that everyone she encounters is intrigued as to her reasons for travelling alone, a fascination that reflects what she calls a "public resent[ment]" of the idea that a girl might be happier "alone and from choice" (109). In answer, Dowie reports:

> I gaze at their indulgent, smiling eyes, and their self-satisfied faces, and I dare not tell them that I do it from sheer bald preference. I couldn't have the heart to wound and shock them so, and I say, what is perhaps also true, that I am driven to it, for nobody cares to come to the places I care to go to. (110)

By articulating the idea of choice and preference against the common expectations of middle-class girlhood, Dowie effectively opens up an imaginative space in which readers can explore their own dissatisfactions and desires. She repeatedly reflects upon the effect of solitary experience on "the tone of your mind," noting: "Ordinarily, you are scarcely on speaking terms with your real self; you catch hurried glimpses of it, darting before you, out of reach of touch and realisation" (107). Such a comment challenges readers to view girls (whether or not that be themselves) as complicated, multi-faceted individuals for whom interior and external aspects of the self may be in conflict. This is just the sort of exploration of the female self, a self potentially in conflict with social constructions of femininity, that will be important to so many New Woman novels.

It is on the topic of clothes that Dowie gestures most overtly towards some of the more controversial issues surrounding the Woman Question. Throughout the text, fashion and clothing are used to express further this disjuncture between the interior and exterior world of the modern girl, between respectable femininity and the adventurous spirit of our heroine who is throughout delighted by "all the freedom of

knickerbockers" ("In Ruthenia" 521). Dowie makes the case for the practicality of her controversial sartorial decision, but it is clear that her mountain sandals and knickerbockers represent much more than simple convenience. At the end of the narrative, she laments the return of "civilised inconveniences" such as hats, shoes, and stockings, though ironically it is the laborious effort required to put on her mountain attire that will be missed (Girl 285). Just as solitude has garnered opportunities for self-reflection, so "quite twenty minutes could be agreeably passed" in the simple pleasure of carefully threading and re-threading woollen cords and sandal straps. By comparison, Western dress is regimented and uninspiring: "All this was over then; four turns of a button-hook and I was shod in the morning. How commonplace, how unimaginative!" (284). Not even "the lightest, prettiest French shoes" can compare to the experience of the hardy, rough socks that carried Dowie through her beloved Karpathian mountains (284).

In addition, this interest in clothing throughout the book reflects her wider political commitment to the movement for Rational Dress, that key signifier of late-nineteenth-century feminism much associated with the New Woman. In her article on cross-dressing and New Woman fiction, Ann Heilmann suggests that "Dress reform was central to British feminism because it attacked Victorian patriarchy by highlighting the constructed (and constricting) nature of 'feminine' and 'masculine' clothes, and therefore, by implication, of 'feminine' and 'masculine' spheres" (87). Dowie's devotion to knickerbockers could certainly be considered as cross-dressing in this sense, although, unlike some of the characters in later New Woman novels who disguise themselves as boys and men, she seems to reject the idea that she was actively seeking to impersonate a man via her choice of clothing. Nevertheless, she makes explicit connections between clothing and her feminist principles. The preface

to the fourth edition closes on this very issue: specifically noting that some reviewers have portrayed her (erroneously, she argues) as "dashing, masculine, and a monument of bravery… Masculine, by reason of my knickerbockers" (vii), Dowie ends the preface on a fittingly stirring note that looks forward to a more egalitarian future:

> Perhaps I peered hazardously into the foggy future, but I would like to say that I have felt the refreshing chill of that day's dawn, when it will be held impertinence to praise a woman for bravery which one expects calmly from a man, and none shall be advertised because she wears knickerbockers when these are suitable, any more than she is when - like a man - she opens her umbrella if it rain.
>
> Ah! the vision of such a future leaves one gasping, does it not? (viii).

Such polemical flourishes are not confined to this preface. The Young Woman interviewer receives some typically witty and far from retiring answers in response to questions about the "position of women" and whether a girl might wear short skirts on a muddy day:

> [Dowie's] breezy answer is just this: "If it were a new question put to a new race of intelligent beings without a congestion of conservatism in their brains, it would have, no doubt, one answer, 'Yes, if she wants to.'" (P.L.P. 212).

On the divide between the "rationals and skirts," Dowie remarks that "one might have wider skirts, but certainly not wider minds" (211).

References to knickerbockers and rational dress are not the only moments in

the book that relate explicitly to concerns associated with the New Woman. Dowie is either perpetually smoking or rolling cigarettes during her journey – another key New Woman trope.[12] Youngkin notes that Dowie's smoking was satirised in some sections of the women's press, which viewed smoking as "the mark of the feminist who had 'gone too far' in her embrace of non-traditional gender roles" (127). If we consider this alongside one of the photographs that accompany the Young Woman interview, in which she proudly poses with her bicycle, we might wonder to what extent Dowie is playfully engaging with (perhaps influencing) the caricatured representations of the New Woman found in publications such as Punch.

We might again wonder at her apparent acceptability within girls' magazines such as Girl's Realm, Atalanta and Young Woman if this is indeed the case. In some respects, Dowie seems too outspoken, her representation of girlhood perhaps too confident and action-packed, to be made to fit into the editorial demystification of the New Woman that frequently occurs in such magazines. Despite engaging with topics associated with the New Woman and the Woman Question more broadly, girls' magazines frequently dismissed the figure of the New Woman as a sensationalised journalistic invention. In her "Between Ourselves" column for Young Woman published the previous year to the interview with Dowie, for example, Mrs. Esler warned readers about confusing "the present advance of women" with "the mental and moral excesses of the mythical and absolutely non-existent type – The New Woman" (107).

Dowie's endorsement in these magazines despite her associations with the New Woman is arguably determined by her ability to extend the literary persona put forth in A Girl in the Karpathians. Again and again, she demonstrates a considerable ability to disarm the reader with rhetorical wit. Rather unusually, the author of the

Young Woman interview prefaces the interview proper with a letter sent by Dowie, in which she brushes off reports of the celebrated charm and unconventionality of her personality. She explains that she would prefer not to be interviewed as she is so often misrepresented; however:

> If, after this free statement you care to come and see me, why, please do. I shall suffer acutely from anything you write, and however nice you and Mr Atkins [the editor] may be about it, we shall, between us, only succeed in misleading the public about my personality (which is unimportant). But never mind: you shall find me quite tame and amiable. (P.L.P. 208)

Of course, the letter is nothing if not an exercise in the winning qualities of Dowie's humorous and self-aware personality (which is important). But by stating her concern that her words may be portrayed in a way that is "utterly foreign to [her] lips" at the outset of this lengthy interview, and suggesting that this is a frequent occurrence, Dowie cleverly pre-empts any problems that may arise from her comments. The letter's tone recalls the preface to the fourth edition of A Girl in the Karpathians, in which Dowie self-deprecatingly regrets the lack of sensational bear attacks but in doing so fully communicates the popularity and vivacity of her book.

The relationship between Dowie's self-deprecating wit and her status as a pro-Rational Dress, "advanced woman" is interesting. In a 1901 profile written by her friend, the writer (and sometime editor of Young Woman) Ethel Heddle for the magazine Good Words, Dowie declares that:

> "I should like something said to show that I am not a woman's rights woman, in that aggressive sense; that I do not rejoice in ugly

> clothes" – (Mrs Norman's clothes partake of her individuality, more than any other woman's I know, and are always original and charming) – "and that I am not desirous of reforming the world, or doing anything subversive of the present agreeable muddle, which is so well suited to lazy women like myself" (18).

Dowie's connection between clothes and women's rights, as well as Heddle's aside about Mrs Norman's "original and charming" clothes, is notable in the context of the Rational Dress debate. Written a decade after the publication of A Girl in the Karpathians, Dowie's comments perhaps reflect the more widespread association between the women's movement and the mannish caricatures of the New Woman, popularised in the intervening years. Her reference to her own "laziness" and her description of the current Woman Question as an "agreeable muddle" effectively de-sensationalise both herself and the supposed dangers of feminism.

Turning back to A Girl in the Karpathians, this ability to disarm the reader with a variety of rhetorical devices enables Dowie to get away with some rather surprising content in the narrative in addition to her discussion of modern fashion: allusions to sexual attraction, for example, are direct and unmistakable, but are simultaneously rendered unthreatening by her playful wit. When a village schoolmaster leaves a French novel at the farmhouse in which she is staying, expressly intended for her to read and return to him, Dowie reports sardonically that she "took the novel, and the hint as well" (106). Her lightness of touch deflects from the potential controversy of such an attempt at seduction by European literature, rendering the schoolmaster ridiculous. Later, she incorporates in full the poem dedicated to her by the love-struck admirer. The poem is published only in its original German and Dowie's rhetorical savvy is clear to see in her comments about its

inclusion:

> I spare myself the blushes to which the effort of translation would give rise – I leave these verses in their native simplicity. Of course I am glad that the old gentleman thought me a princess or a countess, and a scientific healer to boot. I shall always be certain I had a reputation in the village as a White Witch. (112-3)

In typical fashion, Dowie has managed to assure us of her feminine modesty while drawing quite particular attention to the remarkable impression she has inspired in others.

Further insight into the relationship between Dowie's popularity and her acceptability as a writer read by girls of the period can be drawn when we compare a similar narrative strategy at play both in her book and in the work of the previously mentioned L.T. Meade, who helped to popularise the figure of the "Wild Irish Girl" in her girls' books of the 1880s and 90s. Meade's deployment of this popular figure enabled her to create characters that were naughty and rebellious but ultimately unthreatening.[13] Dressing in bright colours, striking fabrics and provocative designs, the protagonists in such Meade books as Wild Kitty (1897) are readily identifiable by their clothes. Similarly, some of Dowie's sartorial choices work to portray her as something of a "Wild Scottish Girl." Though mainly raised in Liverpool and France, Dowie was of Scottish parentage and spent several years in the West Highlands as a child, and she seems to have strongly identified herself as Scottish both in A Girl in the Karpathians and more generally. Striding among the mountains and listening to the river, she declares that:

> … it is all so Scotch, that my heart literally glowed with love of it,

> and I twisted my tartan cloak, plaid fashion, round me, settled my Tam O'Shanter on my head, and glorified in my nationality, and the good luck that has made me a Scotch lassie. Now, this is really Scotch. (58)

This emphasis on her Celtic passion and its related clothing adds to the dynamism of her personality, but it arguably also excuses or makes safe some of her wildness. Dowie is something "other," therefore she is not necessarily subject to the same rules of respectable behaviour. This "otherness" is gestured towards in the schoolmaster's poem about her – she is a feminine princess but she is also something more peculiar and unknowable – a "white witch" and a "healer." In his review, Minchin comments that if we did not know she was Scottish from her frequent references, "the authoress might pass for a Yankee" (533). As with the schoolmaster, the appeal of Dowie's writing for Minchin lies in its bewitching foreignness, but it is a foreignness that fits into the literary paradigm of the Wild Celtic figure, whose wildness is ultimately unthreatening.

This quality enables her to function in both worlds, as the *Young Woman* interviewer remarks: "There is little in her slight, somewhat delicate figure to suggest what she truly is – an intrepid traveller!" (P.L.P. 208). Dowie's description of her time in the West Highlands in this same interview is perhaps unintentionally revealing. She calls it "a life like a settler's" in which she "learned to skin beasts" and "fetch home wood from the hills" (208). Yet, these adventures were accompanied by "private lessons from a schoolmistress who lived near," and "the St George's Correspondence Classes in Edinburgh," which allowed her to "continue [her] English education" (208-9).[14] This juxtaposition of two kinds of formative education – the wild outdoors of Scotland and the enclosed world of the private schoolroom–captures

well the two sides of Dowie's personality, which enable her to inhabit the literary world as a celebrity "advanced woman." In addition, her comments that "[g]irls, somehow or other, live in too narrow a world at school, just when they ought to be living in a wider world," obviously gleaned from her own experiences of a multi-faceted education, are suggestive of the appeal of a book such as A Girl in the Karpathians to a generation of girl readers, happy to become her "company of critics" (209, 208).

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In the closing words of Ethel Heddle's profile of Dowie, she reminisces about a time in which the pair lived in Paris with some other girls: "Three of us were workers, rich only in hope and endeavour, but no happier four are to be found in all the gay French capital!" (20). Heddle's romanticised description gestures towards what so attracts and charms the readers of A Girl in the Karpathians, especially girl readers. As editor of Young Woman in 1900-01 and the author of such novels as Three Girls in a Flat (1896), Heddle is clearly professionally and personally engaged with what interests and appeals to girl readers. In her profile of Dowie, she notes that "As Mrs Norman writes, she talks. She is not like some authors, whose vivacity, whose wit and humour, are only to be bought by so many guineas per thousand words" (19). This personality infuses both the book itself and interviews given by Dowie. In doing so, the sense of girlhood as a period of endeavour and adventure as displayed in Heddle's short comment on their Parisian experience reaches its ultimate expression atop the Karpathian mountains. The initial responses to the book, not to mention the content of the Fortnightly Review article that preceded the book's publication, indicate that girls were not necessarily the initial target readership aimed at by either Dowie or her publishers. Yet, Dowie's position in the girls' periodical

press and her later preface suggest that this readership played a key role in the book's commercial success.

It is possible that the popularity among this readership accounts in part for the lack of attention paid to the book in subsequent years. For many of the New Woman writers, and also for other writers of the era such as Henry James, the modern girl served as a symbol of social dissatisfaction in a range of novels. Yet, Dowie's generically unusual book depicts the New Girl differently – not as doomed, threatening, or alarmingly "advanced," but self-deprecating, conscientious, and disarmingly endearing. Skirting the borders of a number of disparate genres – part adventure fiction (despite its author's plea otherwise), part travel memoir, part New Woman manifesto – A Girl in the Karpathians fits uneasily into the general definitions of the New Woman writing. But with its emphasis on gendered injustices, on the complexity of female interior worlds, on the politicisation of clothing, and on the rights of girls and women to engage in independent activities, the book has a great deal in common with the overall ideologies of the New Woman writers with whom Dowie would be so readily identified after the publication of Gallia in 1895. A Girl in the Karpathians challenges us to think differently about writing that found much of its popularity amongst girls and young women, and that diverges from strictly fictional forms, as perhaps additional components of the New Woman writing, and as an important part of the history of late-nineteenth-century women's writing more broadly. Moreover, the book and its history of various paratextual features and accompanying articles and interviews shed further light on Ménie Muriel Dowie herself, an author whose literary career was untimely cut short by the scandal of a public divorce and whose body of work is still rather under-discussed. Dowie's ability to captivate the literary marketplace upon the publication of her first book reveals a

great deal about the nature of literary celebrity in the early 1890s and the ways in which some women writers successfully used this to their advantage, even if that success was all too brief.

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Notes

[1] See, in particular, Kate Flint, The Woman Reader (1993), Lyn Pykett, The "Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing (1992), Sally Ledger, The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism in the Fin de Siècle (1997), and Gail Cunningham, The New Woman and the Victorian Novel (1978) and "He-Notes: Reconstructing Masculinity" (2001).

[2] In her account of Dowie's personal difficulties, Small offers a convincing explanation as to why she appears to have stopped writing at the age of thirty-five following the scandal of her very public divorce from Henry Norman.

[3] As a result of her marriage, some of the later editions of A Girl in the Karpathians (including the fourth edition, which is the main version discussed in this essay) are attributed to Mrs. Ménie Muriel Norman. Many of the interviews and allusions to Dowie throughout the periodical press at this time also refer to her as Mrs. Norman.

[4] An exception to this is Molly Youngkin's Feminist Realism at the Fin de Siècle: The Influence of the Late-Victorian Woman's Press on the Development of the Novel (2007). In her chapter "Women at Work, at War, and on the Go," Youngkin considers the representation of female action in A Girl in the Karpathians and in Dowie's 1893

edited collection, Women Adventurers, before moving on to discuss Gallia in more detail.

[5] See Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, "Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics During the Fin-de-Siècle." Victorian Periodicals Review 31:2 (1998): 169-82.

[6] Sally Mitchell, The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880-1915 (1995) and Carol Dyhouse, Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England (1981).

[7] It is important to point out that the term "girl" in this context implies a wider definition in terms of age than we might use in the twenty-first century. As Michelle Smith states: "The 'girl' reader of this period was not equated with childhood or even adolescence, but could be aged anywhere from ten years old to her mid-twenties" (7). Other factors are clearly at play in terms of what defines girlhood, such as marital status and class, as well as self-identifying as such by engaging with the print culture that helped to construct the modern girl. Hence, Dowie's Karpathian "Girl" can very much be considered to be a girl despite celebrating her twenty-third birthday while on her adventure.

[8] The Girl's Own Paper was a weekly penny paper; the other magazines mentioned are monthlies: at 6d. Girl's Realm and Atalanta aimed towards the more affluent end of the market, while Young Woman was priced at 3d.

[9] See Elizabeth Segel, "As the Twig is Bent…: Gender and Childhood Reading." (1986).

[10] It should be noted that not all of Atalanta's regular "Brown Owl" column was written by Meade – some sections were written by guest contributors, for example. However, in the absence of a signature at the end of this particular review and given the general structure of the column, it seems logical to conclude that this review was

indeed written by Meade herself, whose signature is at the end of the column as a whole.

[11] There is some inconsistency in Dowie's spelling of "C/Karpathian" between her Fortnightly article and her book. I have reproduced the spelling of the original material in each instance. Interestingly, Dowie provides an explanation for her spelling decisions in a later 'at home' profile for Bow Bells magazine. Appearing late in 1891, when the book was already a publishing sensation, Dowie perhaps felt more comfortable addressing her politicised response to the spelling quandary: "I spell it with a 'K' advisedly … every other nation under the face of the sun does so except ourselves, and I don't see what right we have to protest in that foolish interloping 'C.' If there's one thing in the world a country has a right to do, it is to spell her own name as she likes, and other countries ought to respect her prejudices" (Davidson 431).

[12] Dowie's enjoyment of smoking does not appear to have been any kind of posturing – Helen Small notes that she "still chain-smoked" into the 1930s and 40s, "despite the fact that she suffered badly from asthma and was increasingly dependent on a vaporiser" (xxxv).

[13] For more on Meade's popularisation of the "Wild Irish Girl," see my essay "Irishness, Authorship and the 'Wild Irish Girls' of L.T. Meade," English Literature in Transition 56.2 (2013), 131-51.

[14] These classes are also recommended to a reader in an 1899 "Answers to Correspondents" in the Girl's Own Paper (111). Costing 12s. per term per subject, the classes are reportedly designed to "prepare for the preliminary examination of the Scottish Universities, the St Andrews L.L.A. examination, and also direct home study" (111).

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